

Information note

Sound management of chemicals and waste in the SDG context

Open-ended CPR Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP

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Summary

The present note has been developed by the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, in cooperation with UNEP Chemicals and Waste Branch, including the interim secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the secretariat of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management.

The note describes the importance of the sound management of chemicals and wastes for the achievement of the 2030 sustainable development agenda and presents ongoing efforts undertaken by partners in the chemicals and wastes cluster to implement the chemicals and wastes part of the sustainable development agenda.

1. Chemicals and wastes in Sustainable Development Goals

- 1.1. In 2015 world leaders agreed on a shared vision about the world we want to see in 2030 by adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. For the chemicals and wastes cluster, this means detoxifying air, water and soil, promoting the use of safe chemicals and chemical alternatives, minimizing the use of toxic substances in production and consumption, preventing or reducing the generation of hazardous and other wastes, and safely managing them.
- 1.2. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets demonstrate the scale and ambition of this new universal Agenda. They are integrated and indivisible and strike a balance in the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. Chemicals and wastes are reflected in a number of goals and targets, including health, water, cities and human settlements, oceans, and sustainable consumption and production.
- 1.3. The sound management of chemicals and waste, although less pronounced, is also important in areas such as education, gender equality, and climate change. As such,

it acknowledges the key cross-cutting nature of this issue which can provide practical solutions to overcome global and local challenges. Thus, its full integration in the global sustainable development policy is crucial for the societies to have clean air and water, sanitation, safe food, sustainable ecosystems and cities, while promoting healthy lives, safe jobs and sustainable economic growth.

- 1.4. While chemicals are a major contributor to national economies, a clear link has been established between poverty and increased risks of exposure to hazardous chemicals and waste: it is predominantly the poor who routinely face unacceptably high risks because of their occupation, living situation and lack of knowledge about the detrimental impacts of exposure to dangerous chemicals and waste.
- 1.5. The Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions and the UNEP Chemicals and Waste Branch, including the interim secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the secretariat of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, together with many others partners coordinated their efforts to ensure that the chemicals and wastes management issues were integrated into relevant SDGs and associated targets.
- 1.6. To effectively implement the comprehensive and integrated nature of the SDGs as they relate to chemicals and wastes, the global community needs to move beyond minimizing the adverse effects of toxic chemicals and stockpiles to human health and ecosystems. A circular and life-cycle approach for Sustainable Consumption and Production, and a proactive framework to address related environment and health issues, coupled with measures to advance a green economy and sustainable chemistry at all levels is needed to support the effective implementation of the SDGs. Equally important, we need to promote mainstreaming of chemicals and hazardous waste management into national environment, public health, social and economic policies and legislations.

2. Health and other costs of unsound management of chemicals and wastes

- 2.1. As outlined in the draft thematic report on “Healthy Environment, Healthy People”, prepared for UNEA-2, there is evidence of the linkages between environmental quality and human health and well-being. Many health gains have been made in recent decades due to improvements in science and technology, research and development, and greater provision and access to healthcare facilities and education as economies develop. However, there is also a substantive and growing body of evidence that shows that current environmental trends may slow or inhibit further improvements. It is estimated that nearly one quarter of all diseases and

deaths are due to hazards from unhealthy living and working environments.¹ One third of this burden of disease impacts children in particular.²

2.2. In 2012 alone, exposure to polluted soil, water and air resulted in an estimated 8.9 million deaths worldwide —8.4 million of those deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries.^{3,4} By comparison, HIV/AIDS causes 1.5 million deaths per year⁵, tuberculosis between 1 and 1.2 million⁶ and malaria fewer than 1 million⁷.

2.3. In the United States the health costs of asthma in children caused by toxic chemicals of human origin in air, food, water and communities amount to 2 billion USD per year.⁸ In China costs associated with premature mortality and morbidity from air pollution were equal to 19 billion USD in 2013.⁹ The costs of inaction are indeed high not only for ecosystems, but also for society, communities, and individuals.

3. Effective governance structure for the sound management of chemicals and wastes

3.1. The 2030 Agenda provides a new opportunity for enhancing coherence in international policy and law-making at all levels. The issue of hazardous chemicals and wastes demonstrates the opportunities at hand for the implementation of the SDGs, building on existing global and regional commitments and initiatives (including those made through MEAs). Among the key global instruments that address chemicals and wastes management are the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the newly adopted Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).

3.2. In Johannesburg in 2002, at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) governments agreed to achieve, by 2020, that chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment. The 2020 target was further recognised in the Rio+20 outcome “The Future We Want”. SAICM also reaffirmed the Johannesburg 2020 goal.

¹ WHO (2006) *Preventing diseases through healthy environment- Data is from 2002*

² WHO, ILO, UNEP (2006) *Helping to protect children from the harmful effects of chemicals* International Program on chemical Safety (<http://www.who.int/ipcs/en/>).

³ Air pollution estimates for 2012 (http://www.who.int/phe/health_topics/outdoorair/databases/en/)

⁴ Contaminated sites data extrapolated from the database maintained by the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution (<http://www.gahp.net/new/>)

⁵ WHO, HIV deaths per country, 2012 (<http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.623>).

⁶ WHO, Malaria deaths, 2012 (<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs094/en/>).

⁷ WHO, Number of deaths due to tuberculosis, excluding HIV, 2012 (<http://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.main.57016?lang=en>).

⁸ UNEP (2013), *Costs of Inaction on the Sound Management of Chemicals*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

- 3.3. The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions are three autonomous legally binding instruments that share the same objective of protecting human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals and wastes. Each of the Conventions has a set of specific objectives, dealing with persistent organic pollutants, pesticides and industrial chemicals, and/or hazardous and other wastes, together promoting a lifecycle approach to the sound management of chemicals and wastes. As legally-binding global treaties, the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions are equipped with mechanisms to track, monitor and evaluate the attainment of their objectives. This includes the Strategic Framework and national reporting under the Basel Convention, information exchange on specific chemicals under the Rotterdam Convention, evaluation of convention's effectiveness and global monitoring, national reporting, and national implementation plans under the Stockholm Convention, as well as scientific information collected through the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee of the Stockholm Convention and the Chemical Review Committee of the Rotterdam Convention.
- 3.4. The Minamata Convention on Mercury is a legally binding instrument that aims to protect human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds. Adopted in 2013, it contains measures to control the entire life-cycle of mercury, from its primary extraction, its trade, its uses in mercury-added products, in manufacturing processes as well as in artisanal and small-scale gold mining, its emissions and releases through various processes, its storage, to its treatment as waste. The Minamata Convention includes a dedicated article on "Health aspects" related to mercury. It is estimated that the Convention will enter into force in the third or fourth quarter of 2016 following the deposition of the fiftieth instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession.
- 3.5. The Minamata Convention contributes in a significant way to sustainable development, underlining the importance that the international community attaches to the sound management of chemicals and wastes in a sustainable development context.
- 3.6. SAICM is a voluntary policy framework, established in 2006, to promote chemical safety around the world. SAICM is distinguished by its comprehensive scope and ambitious "2020" goal for sound chemicals management, covering all agricultural and industrial chemicals throughout their life cycles. It has created an inclusive and overarching multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral platform for achieving the World Summit goal of sound chemicals management by 2020. Environmental, economic, social, health and labour aspects of chemical safety are reflected in SAICM and the Quick Start Programme. With its integrated overall approach, SAICM allows for a

balanced consideration of all factors relevant to chemicals management, including the identification of emerging policy issues, and it provides a flexible framework for international action that both complements and goes beyond legally binding approaches.

- 3.7. Despite tremendous efforts made by countries and other stakeholders since the adoption of the 2020 goal in Johannesburg in 2002, the challenges raised by chemicals and wastes are expected to continue to grow worldwide, posing special difficulties to countries which have the least capacity to overcome them.
- 3.8. At their meetings in May 2015, Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions joined the United Nations Environment Assembly in recognizing the continued relevance of the sound management of chemicals and wastes beyond 2020 and stressed the importance of considering policies on strengthening the sound management of chemicals and wastes in the long term.
- 3.9. The fourth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM4) held in September 2015 set out a plan for deciding on a course of action for sound management of chemicals and waste up to 2020. SAICM and sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 was recognized as critical. An intersessional process to assess SAICM was established, in order to sufficiently inform the decision of “the Strategic Approach and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020” at ICCM5. ICCM4 decided that the intersessional process should, among other things, consider the need for and develop recommendations regarding measurable objectives in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- 3.10. Managing all of these aspects will require a highly coordinated and integrated approach to policy-making and their connections with other issues, such as gender equality, economic growth, and employment. While agreeing on the Sustainable Development Goals was a big challenge, now, even a bigger challenge is ahead. It is the challenge of the implementation of this agenda and its chemicals and waste dimension.

4. Future steps

- 4.1. In early 2016, a briefing has been organized for the Geneva-based permanent missions to the United Nations on the importance of the sound chemicals and waste management for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. A similar briefing is planned for the New York based permanent missions to the United Nations later this year.

- 4.2. The intersessional process to prepare recommendations regarding SACIM and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 is currently being established under the SAICM umbrella with full stakeholder involvement. Stakeholders will be notified of the timing of the first meeting of the intersessional process by 31 March 2016. The SAICM secretariat is setting up the independent evaluation of the Strategic Approach for 2006-2015 in accordance with the terms of reference set out in the annex to SAICM resolution IV/4.
- 4.3. An International Expert Workshop on the Integrated National Implementation of SDGs and International Chemicals and Waste Agreements is planned to take place in April 2016 through collaboration with partner organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC). The Workshop will consider, inter alia, how to better integrate chemicals and waste into national strategies and plans on sustainable development, how national implementation of the SDGs can be fostered through implementation of specific MEAs, and what further work and guidance would be valuable for effective monitoring of implementation at the national level, drawing upon SGD targets and indicators as well as other relevant indicators relevant at the national level. In discussing these topics, the workshop is drawing upon case studies and examples of good practices shared by Government, industry and stakeholders.
- 4.4. To strengthen the analytical and scientific underpinning for future sound management of chemicals, UNEP is taking step to prepare a second edition of the Global Chemicals Outlook, with an expert consultation scheduled in April 2016. The overall goal of the meeting is to provide advice on a range of aspects relevant for preparing GCO- II, including identification of strategically relevant chemicals management topics considered to be essential for a post 2020 global approach to chemical management, which would have as its ultimate goal to advance sustainable chemistry globally in a sustainable development context.